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The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Lexington High School's second annual spirit day provided an opportunity for students to show off their talents

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Lexington High School Girls Varsity soccer team makes a historic appearence at the playoffs

Volume LXI Issue III—January 2019

LHS decides on schedule for next year

Ilana Rosker
Athena Li
Staff Writers

As the first semester of the 2018-2019 school year closes, students and parents of the Lexington High School community face new schedule plans.

On Dec. 4, 2018, the School Committee approved later start times, but chose to implement them for the 2020-2021 school year, rather than the 2019-2020 school year.

Three proposed plans for the new schedule format were split into color-coded options: red, blue and green. The names derive from length; red, with the fewest letters, has the shortest blocks, followed by blue and green.

The red option has classes meet four out of six times a week for 55-65 minute durations with five or six classes per day.

The blue option has each class meet three times per week, with classes lasting 60-70 minutes, and four or five classes per day. There would be one 50 minute I Block, one 45 minute I Block, and one 25 minute I Block. The blue option also maintains the current five day cycle, in which the first day is always Monday.

Finally, the green option includes 75-85 minute blocks, creating a day composed of only four classes. It is formatted in an eight day cycle, with four different types of days, each repeating twice in a single cycle. There would be four 45 minute I Blocks in a cycle, as well as two ten-minute breaks in the morning per cycle.

"I dislike [the green option] because I am absolutely positive that I cannot sit in a class for that long," Thierno Barry, a freshman, said.

Luckily for Barry, Principal Stephens, after analyzing several surveys of teachers', students' and parents' opinions, decided to go with the red option, most similar to the school's current schedule.

"75-80% of students wanted either the current schedule or the red option… The schedule will also be reassessed in two to three years," Mr. Spalding, a world history teacher at LHS, said.

After months of talks, LEA and School Committee ratify a contract

Christina Li
Daisy Li
Staff Writers

Quite a few Lexington High School educators sport a yellow pin that reads "Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions." These pins are part of a recent debate about the working conditions and salaries of teachers in the Lexington School District. Just before winter break, some of these concerns were resolved in a new contract.

Every labor union has a contract with employers concerning working conditions. By state law, the employer-worker contract for public sector unions expires and must be revisited at least every three years.

The Lexington Education Association has four contracts: one for the professional educators (teachers), one for the instructional aides, one for the secretarial staff and one for technology workers. These recent contract negotiations were only for Unit A, the teachers' contract.

"Contracts evolve over decades. [They frame] the relationship between the worker and employer. Every three years, you go back and relook at it and say is this working, is it not, and what can we do to fix the fact that our realities have changed in the past three years?", Dr. Avon Lewis, president of the LEA, said.

The previous contract expired on Sept. 1, 2018. Beginning in January of 2018, School Committee representatives and the LEA met on multiple occasions to present their respective concerns and visions for a future contract.

"The more students we have, the harder it is to know all of them as well and therefore what their needs are… A big concern is special education. People who have more severe disabilities have the highest needs from their teachers. As those populations have grown, the number of people we've hired has not kept pace," Laura Sheppard-Brick, LHS math teacher and high school representative on the negotiating team, said.

The LEA negotiating team comprises Dr. Lewis, at least one representative from every Lexington Public School and several special educators. The School Committee's negotiating team consisted of a member of the School Committee, the superintendent, central office staff and principals. The LEA and the School Committee were unable to come to a mutual agreement at the end of the 2017-2018 year, thus carrying the negotiations into the first semester of the 2018-2019 year.

A sticking point was how much of the district's budget would be devoted to hiring more staff.

"Teachers came in with a number of proposals that were expensive. The single biggest line in [the] district's budget is payroll: paying people who come here to work. We [the teachers] were advocating for looking at staffing. The School Committee didn't want to spend that money," Dr. Lewis said.

After months of negotiations, the vote to ratify the contract happened in the week before break. Both the School Committee and the union voted to accept the contract.

"There's actually two contracts, one that runs just for this year and one that runs for the three years after that. Some of the things that we agreed on will be put into place this year, and other things will be put into place next year, such as staffing and scheduling," Sheppard-Brick said.

The new contract ameliorated some of the concerns regarding special education teachers.

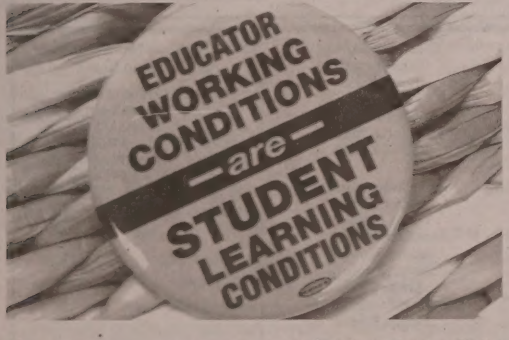
"There was a lot of movement on the special ed concerns: some staffing increases that are immediate and [there was] a pretty serious commitment to continually look at issues of overwork and equity," Sheppard-Brick said.

However, concerns regarding counselors and core subject teachers remain, and will be discussed in a working group over the next few years.

"There was a more measured response to the counseling issues… We brought some ideas to the table, but they were prohibitively expensive. There is a commitment from both sides for this to get addressed in the next contract," Sheppard-Brick said.

Sheppard-Brick was optimistic about future negotiations.

"Negotiating with Dr. Hackett was a very positive experience… My experience negotiating changed significantly in this year, when Dr. Hackett came on board. She was really committed to hearing teachers' concerns in a way that previous negotiators were not," Sheppard-Brick said.



Staff photo by Rebecca Kielar
Many teachers wore yellow pins that read: "Educator Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions.

Students are playing too small a role in school policy discussions

As talks concerning new schedules and later start times circulate in Lexington High School, one may wonder why students aren't playing a bigger role in the discussion of these major changes.

The main mode of communication between the school administration and students is in the form of homeroom announcements, which are not necessarily effective at spreading the word about feedback opportunities.

"Homeroom is difficult because it becomes a scramble to get I Block, and announcements happen at the end of the block instead of the beginning, which causes [these] announcements to get the back burner," Holly Gilligan, an English teacher at LHS, said.

But it's not entirely the administration's fault; students should also take more initiative in formulating school policy.

The LHS administration has sent out two surveys and has been holding I Block sessions to receive student feedback. Though these are beneficial, student response has been measured.

"Sometimes students' plates already seem too full. Students are too busy to take advantage of the opportunities, and feel that their input won't make a difference, which is not true," Gilligan said.

Gilligan is right: there's a prevalent misconception that the opinions of students don't matter and won't change the eventual outcome of a decision. This couldn't be further from the truth; in recent years, the administration has consistently listened to individual students and student groups.

However, the inactivity of the student body combined with the limited opportunities provided by the LHS administration have created an absence of student input during this important decision making processes.

With the rise of nationwide student movements such as Students Demand Action and #Enough, the number of high school students getting involved at both the micro and macro political levels has skyrocketed. This new-found wave of activism sweeping the country can and should be applied to the LHS community.

We've done a good job so far:

"In the three years I've been here, student involvement has expanded recognized holidays to be more inclusive, the homework and test policies truly help alleviate stress, and lunches now contain compost bins to reduce the amount of foods we waste," Ashlan Ahmed, a junior, said.

Staff photo by Talia Blatt

Junior Ashlan Ahmed is a student ambassador for LEF.

But further participation is crucial, and can manifest in different ways, such as participating in I Block sessions, attending School Committee meetings and joining organizations specific to LHS, such as the Lexington Education Foundation, which takes student input seriously.

"As a student ambassador for LEF, at the end of the year, we talk about new classes and whether they will benefit the student body...this included the Women in Literature class," Ahmed said.

Involvement within administrative reform is vital to improving the quality of education provided at LHS. Without student involvement, it becomes increasingly difficult for School Committee officials to decide how to develop learning systems that can accommodate each new generation. Involvement is key to fixing the gap between the higher authorities and the student body that will be most affected by their decisions. Ultimately, any school ruling, whether it's a later start time or a different schedule, will have a profound effect on the student body. It's in every student's best interest to make sure their views are represented and heard.

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It's time to stop laughing at mental illness

■ Alexa Christ
Columnist

Content Warning: Non-graphic mentions of mental illness

The release of YouTuber Shane Dawson's docuseries about the life of Jake Paul has become very controversial because of the way people with antisocial personality disorder, commonly referred to as sociopaths, are portrayed. While some Twitter users embraced Dawson's attempts to raise awareness, others objected to his flawed and hurtful representations of the disorder.

Mental illness has long been a source of entertainment in our society, prevalent in horror movies, television shows and sensationalist media coverage of violent criminals. But can the label of "entertainment" justify outdated and inaccurate portrayals of mental illness?

To me, the series immediately set off alarms. Dawson's portrayal of antisocial personality disorder is dehumanizing: He mixes eerie music and highly edited video clips with serious interviews to make people with the disorder appear evil and crazy. After Dawson mentioned the statistic that one out of every 25 people is a sociopath, I sat in my classes the next day thinking: okay, which one of us is it? I completely fell for this dramaticized portrayal of a mental illness. The dangerous part is that I wasn't the only one.

The docuseries promoted negative misunderstandings of the disorder. Dawson's intent was to help raise awareness, which should be commended, but it was done incorrectly; ultimately, the docuseries brought fear. I was disappointed to say the least, but not surprised.

Accurate understandings of mental illness both in media and in the classroom are novel and rare. Although it may always be a fragile topic, we should work towards normalizing the discussion of mental illness not only nationally but also in our own Lexington community. If we take the lead in welcoming this discussion, hopefully others will follow.

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Can't change a tire? You're not alone

Katya Ivanenko
Shashwati Sanjay
Staff Writers

We know that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. We can identify themes and motifs in complex texts. Some of us can even do multivariable calculus.

But how many of us can make a tuna noodle casserole, change a tire or darn a pair of socks?

Lexington High School should create classes or I Block enrichment sessions to teach life skills. Learning how to cook or do taxes would be immensely beneficial to students, especially graduating seniors who will soon need to take care of themselves.

"When we learn [the skills] earlier on, we have more time to practice them later in life," Prakshi Kare, a freshman, said.

Exposing students to situations they could face outside of high school prepares them for the future. While not necessarily a panacea, these classes could make life down the road easier.

"Often, when high schoolers graduate, they don't know how to use these life skills and they have trouble," Serena Behera, a junior, said. "It would be helpful to have some hands-on practice."

However, with a growing student population and overbooked classrooms, LHS already faces space and human capital constraints. Adding more classes to the catalogue could necessitate more teachers, more equipment and a whole new curriculum. But trial I Block enrichment sessions could test interest without placing an impossible burden on teachers or disrupting the ever-evolving schedule.

The world-class exposure to world languages, sciences, mathematics and the arts LHS students receive is remarkable and underappreciated. We are excellently intellectually prepared for college and beyond, both because of the content we are taught and the diverse, tolerant setting we are taught in. But that academic preparation doesn't obviate the need for the nitty-gritty skills we'll use as we become adults. And for many kids, high school may be the only time and place they'll have to learn.

This doesn't mean we need to adopt sweeping changes, or abandon the high learning standards that have made the Lexington Public Schools so renowned.

Perhaps we can modify existing, required curricula to mitigate this skills deficit: We could learn about taxes in math class, or learn to fix clothes in our foundations of art class. It would be something to answer the proverbial question every student has asked him or herself at one point: When will I ever really use this?

Staff photo by Rebecca Kielar

Many high school students lack valuable life skills, such as the ability to change a tire.

American public schools aren't paying teachers enough

Sarah Liu
Columnist

Question: Teachers, who needs 'em?

Answer: We do.

As students, our teachers can be our greatest influences, imparting lessons relevant both in and out of the classroom. They are crucial to our growth and development.

American public schools need to raise teachers' wages, or we will face a national education crisis.

The annual average pay for an entry-level teaching job is around $36,000, which is lower than the median American income. The Economic Policy Institute found that teachers earn 18.7% less than other college graduates working full-time and recieve wages that place them on the cusp of the poverty line. In order to support their families, teachers are forced to take extra jobs; in fact, teachers are 30% more likely to seek a second job compared to Americans who do not work in education.

Public school educators receive unreasonably low pay, but numerous reports have found that their wages are stagnating, and will continue to do so without policy change. Possibly as a result, students are less likely to choose education as their professional field.

"If we want to attract, retain and motivate the best and the brightest, we need to raise the starting salaries of teachers to be competitive with other professions. Otherwise, we're not going to raise the standard of teaching and invite a broader spectrum into the field," Bob Willoughby, Associate Director of Research with the New Jersey Education Association, said.

Low teachers' wages aren't just causing problems for teachers, but also for the future of education as a whole. Already, fewer college graduates want to become teachers. Public education has an outstanding legacy in America; for centuries it has enabled children of all socioeconomic classes to become successful. If public education standards fall due to a shortage of teachers, it will impede the ability of all students to have access to high-quality education, especially those in poorer districts.

If America doesn't begin paying public school teachers livable wages, teachers will leave the industry without suitable people to replace them. Without teachers, America will be unable to provide adequate and accessible education to members of future generations.

Best Buddies hosts annual dodgeball tournament

Samiha Kazi
Bryant Xia
Staff Writers

On Nov. 15, Lexington Best Buddies wrapped up their seventh annual dodgeball tournament. The Zambroskis took home the win.

Lexington Best Buddies is a branch of Best Buddies International, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. One of the world's largest anti-ableism organizations, Best Buddies enables volunteers to form one-to-one relationships with buddies, and act as friends and mentors.

To compete in the tournament, each team paid an entry fee of $25. Overall, the event raised more than $400 for the organization, and enabled students involved in the Lexington, Arlington, Burlington, Bedford, Belmont Collaborative (LABBB) to participate in organized activities with their high school friends.

The beginning of the tournament featured a round of dodgeball for Best Buddies pairs. Partners worked together to eliminate their opponents and protect each other from incoming balls.

"Some of my favorite moments [were] watching the buddies high five each other when they got an out… one girl, she's wheelchair bound, and I would go run and get the ball and hand it to her and her face would light up with happiness when she got the chance to throw it," Amanda Fucci, a junior, said.

After a round of dodgeball between buddy pairs and two days of practice, the tournament officially began.

"The cheers from the stands and other onlookers couldn't [have been] more supportive," Seth Cutler, a junior, said.

An intense moment occurred in the semi-finals when a match was tied. The two remaining players went head to head for five minutes straight.

"The entire gym was screaming and cheering for the boy who brought his team to the finals. It was so exciting," Fucci said.

The tournament is an opportunity for LHS students to interact with students in the LABBB program.

"[Dodgeball] helps students with special needs create meaningful friendships with high school students," Fucci said.

Tournament organizers hope to involve more students next year.

Photo courtesy of Kelly Hui

Best Buddies members played dodgeball as part of an annual fundraiser.

Alumni Corner: Jessica Rosenbloom takes us back to the 80's

■ Kylin Gao
Staff Writer

Jessica Bussgang Rosenbloom, an alum from the class of 1982, talked to The Musket about her years at LHS.

Q: When did you attend LHS?

A: I attended LHS from 1979 to 1982. When I attended LHS, 10th, 11th and 12th graders were the only students in the building.

Q: What is the most memorable experience you had at LHS?

A: One of my classmates, Dan Murphy, was paralyzed during a swimming accident over the summer while we were in high school. When he wheeled across the stage at our graduation, it was incredibly touching when everyone clapped and gave him a rousing celebration.

Q: In recent years, LHS has been known for its competitive academics. Was it like this when you attended LHS? How do you think LHS has changed over the years?

A: LHS has always been a competitive school and one of the top-ranked in the state academically. LHS also always had strong sports programs and strong performing arts, although in 1982, there were not as many teams for girls as there are today. LHS offered leveled classes and in the most rigorous courses, there were many students who were academically gifted and went on to attend highly selective colleges and universities. I had remarkable and talented classmates. I don't think that has changed over the years. We had different cafeterias in different buildings, which we called houses, as opposed to the one cafeteria you have now. In addition, there were pay phones in the hallway by the main office. We had to use a dime and later a quarter to call for a ride. Cell phones and laptops didn't exist. The main way that LHS has changed is the technology that is part of our day-to-day lives and has been incorporated into the curriculum.

Q: What's something you learned in LHS that helped you in life? It doesn't have to be academic: valuable friendships, interpersonal skills and hobbies all count.

A: Growing up in Lexington, I was very dedicated to ice skating. I spent a lot of time at Hayden Recreation Centre, and I was very lucky it was located across the street from the high school so I could easily go back and forth. The LHS Administration was very helpful, allowing me to go to the rink during lunch and study halls. I didn't have to take gym (it wasn't a state law in those days) so I skated during that block as well. And I took Calculus class at night with the class teacher as my tutor so I could skate during that class time, yet I still got credit for the class and took exams with the class. It was unusual for someone skating at my level to be attending public school. I credit LHS with providing flexibility and support so that I could compete and attend school. Juggling and balancing skating and academics as a teen has served me really well ever since. I am really grateful to LHS for supporting my skating. Last year, I established a living legacy award at LHS so that a skater each year who is a strong LHS student will be recognized with the Jessica Bussgang Rosenbloom Skating Award. This is a merit award. I hope that this spring, many skaters at LHS will apply for the award.

Q: Did LHS help you carve your career path? Did you decide your field of interest in high school?

A: Lexington Public Schools provided a fantastic education for me as I was able to then go on to major in International Relations and French at Tufts University and earn my MBA at Harvard Business School. I had no idea where my career was headed when I was at LHS, and I certainly didn't decide on my career during high school. I currently have my own business working as a consultant, helping coach individuals who are applying to college and graduate school, primarily MBA programs. I am also a U.S. Figure Skating National Judge. I travel around the country to judge competitions and test sessions in different locations. In January, I will judge the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Detroit. I sit on the boards of Tufts University's Entrepreneurship Center, the Harvard Business School Association of Boston and Boston Medical Center.

Q: Are you still in touch with other LHS alums? Anyone you want to give a shoutout?

A: I still see several classmates regularly because many of us live nearby. I live in Wellesley and a few of my classmates do as well. I have a group of friends, a.k.a "The Lexington Girls" – Carol Cooperstein Agranat, Jill Shangold Dougherty, Brenda Kramer Coutinho, Maryellen Sirianos Sanderson and Wendy Johnson who are still in great touch. We even spent a weekend away together this past summer. It is even easier to stay connected to high school friends through social media. The Class of 1982 has its own Facebook page and classmates often share news and organize our reunions as well. I have attended many high school reunions over the years, and I enjoy learning what classmates are up to. I have very fond memories of growing up in Lexington and attending Lexington High School.

Watch these movies if you miss winter break

■ Narek Sahakian
A+E Editor

Winter break might be over (sigh), but the weather is still chilly and the days are still short, which means it's still holiday movie season. Without further ado, here are my top three favorite holiday movies of all time - best viewed with a cup of hot chocolate.

3) Elf (2003)

This movie is simultaneously funny and heartwarming, drawing inspiration from the stories and styles of classic Christmas animation specials. Buddy (Will Ferrell) is a human raised in the North Pole who eventually realizes that he doesn't fit in with his fellow elves. So, he travels to New York to find his father and start a normal life. The highlights of the movie are Buddy's hilarious, genuine albeit inept attempts to find love and acceptance in the modern world. His inability to truly fit in, a theme that stems from the classic story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, will resonate for all audiences.

2) Home Alone (1990)

This movie is ridiculously funny, following nine-year-old Kevin's (Macaulay Culkin's) adventures after his parents leave him home alone during the holidays. Despite its low budget, this movie is a classic. Grounded by Kevin's charm and innocence, Home Alone underscores the importance of family and love. And with a rich score composed by John Williams, it will leave you humming for days.

1) Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966)

Not to be confused with either the live action movie (2000) or the recent Illumination computer animation (2018), the original animated television special Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas sets the standard for any holiday movie. Recent adaptations of this timeless story have centered backstories, taking focus away from the core of the story. This classic meets all standards: plot, animation, voicing and songs. As children and adults become obsessed with gifts and the more material aspects of the holidays, this TV special reminds us about the importance of spending time with loved ones. It will leave you with a heart grown three sizes after each viewing!

Hello, faithful Musketeers!

It's a new year, and our resolution is to stay fresh! This issue pilots an interview section with Lex alumni and also features new installments of ongoing series (Artists of the Issue, Breaking Boundaries and others.)

Will 2019 be the year The Musket finally resolves its position on the Oxford comma? The only way to find out is to keep reading...

Best wishes,
Talia and Rebecca

Second annual Spirit Day receives mixed feedback

Rachel Zhang
Vibhuti Naik
Staff Writers

On Nov. 21, Lexington High School held its second annual Spirit Day. Students and staff participated in a variety of performances and activities, while others in the bleachers watched the acts and games take place.

From Chinese yo-yo to a cappella, Spirit Day provided students with the opportunity to present their talents. Games introduced an element of friendly competition.

"I chose to participate in Spirit Day to contribute to school pride and create a memorable first time performing with Euphoria," Yubin Cho, a junior in Euphoria, an a capella group, said.

A fairly new addition to the school-wide events LHS hosts, Spirit Day was established to encourage a stronger connection between the four grades.

"Spirit Day impacts the LHS community by creating opportunities for students to participate and bond as a grade, and encouraging leadership initiatives that students can take on. Spirit Day ultimately supports a positive and collaborative environment at LHS," Cho said.

However, some students were disappointed by the lack of participation in the event.

"I think right now Spirit Day isn't what it could be. It's sort of just each grade level standing and watching people. At least in my personal experience, there is no feeling of the school community really coming together. If there was some way to include everybody in an activity in smaller groups such as homerooms, people would be more inclined to participate," Karen Oh, a junior, said.

Photo courtesy of Brittney Lin
Earth science teacher Mr. Mixer participated in the pie-eating contest.

LHS students tackle waste reduction

Tony Sjodin
Staff Writer

Since Nov. 16, Lexington High School students have expanded options for waste disposal every Friday during lunch.

The LHS Green Team began a new composting program aimed at reducing the trash from students' lunches. Each public school in the district has its own Green Team, which together form the LPS Green Team, a grassroots organization of parents, staff and students promoting green practices in their schools.

"We've started to work with the high school for a year or two now," Lin Jensen, a member of the LHS Green Team, said. "This project looks very simple—you just put things in a bin—but actually, it's a lot more complex. We had to involve the custodians, we had to involve the principal, we had to work with the food service people and we had to recruit volunteers. Those are a lot of hours."

LHS was the last of the Lexington district schools to start composting. Bridge Elementary School began composting in 2006, followed by Hastings, Harrington and Estabrook in 2016. Fiske began composting in 2017, and Bowman, both middle schools and LHS started in 2018.

"A lot of kids were saying, 'Oh, I remember doing this in elementary school,' which is really nice since it's coming full circle," Tina McBride, another Green Team member, said.

The program currently only runs on Fridays, but its leaders hope to expand.

"If we could have volunteers, we would recycle every day… The second challenge is more communication and education to motivate the kids because we have 2,000 kids, and any population that has even 90% of the people doing the right thing, just 10% of people [throwing] the food into the recycle bin [creates] a lot of contamination that makes our results less successful," Jensen said.

So far, the program has been effective at reducing trash.

"We have estimated throughout all the schools where we compost and recycle, basically the reduction in waste is 80%, sometimes up to 90%," Jensen said.

Composting has several benefits, both environmentally and economically.

"We are taking food waste out of the incinerator waste stream. We in Lexington incinerate our waste, but meat and vegetables don't burn well so it takes more energy to burn our waste and afterwards we still have ash, which ends up going to landfills," McBride said.

The company Black Earth Compost has been collecting compost from the public schools' kitchens, and will now pick up compost thrown away by students as well. Many Lexington residents have also ordered Black Earth Compost collection for their own homes.

"The other benefit is to empower the students so [they] know [they] can do something very simple to help save the planet… This is something we can all do for a few seconds a day to make a huge difference," Jensen said.

Students can sign up to volunteer for ten minutes during lunch to help other students sort their trash. The LHS Chapter of the National Honors Society (NHS) and the school administration both offer community service hours for working with the program.

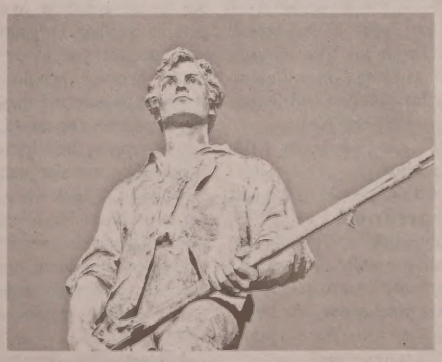
"It does make such an impact if everybody does it.... people can carry it with them throughout their lives," Grace Abe, a senior and NHS president, said.

There were worries that students would be apathetic, but the coordinators were impressed with students' curiosity and willingness to participate.

"That's my attitude, because who cares about Harvard when there's no planet?" Jensen said.

Staff photo by Matt Pearlman
Recycling and composting are now available in Commons II on Fridays.

In Loving Memory of
Janet Haas
January 9, 2019



Can't sing? Don't give up on a capella just yet

Ollie Rourke
Varun Suraj
Staff Writers

Joining the proliferation of new a capella groups is The Sharp Asian Minors, a group founded for non-singers. Juniors Michelle Tu and Rosanna Jiang decided to create a fun group unaffiliated with the official Lexington High School a capella program.

The members hope that their lack of emphasis on singing ability will foster greater accessibility for students to unwind through music.

"We think that music should be for everyone and that we can all benefit from making music and relieving stress through music, despite lack of professional training," Tu said. "That's why we accept everyone. It's not exclusive to just singers."

The group currently has ten members. They have been meeting since September and run rehearsals as often as they can. To choose songs, members vote in a poll.

"Once we [founded] it, we started getting more members," Tu said. "Then we got a little more serious and started doing rehearsals together."

Not surprisingly, the group chooses music for enjoyment.

"We mostly just sing silly songs to have fun," Tu said. "Some songs that we have been practicing include the 'Derp song,' 'Man's Not Hot,' 'Jingle Bells' for the holidays and the 'Narwhal song.'"

The group is a source of community for its members.

"We always laugh a lot and joke around with each other," Antoinette Tan, a junior, said.

The Sharp Asian Minors do not envision becoming an official group in the future, but plan to pursue other ventures.

"We don't plan on being in Jam, " Tu said. "Our goal isn't to be really good singers and make really good music. It's just to have fun."

Staff photos by Anya Ghali
Members of the new a capella group pose for a group photo.

Artist of the Issue: Tung won't toot his own horn, so we will

Ashna Mitta
Emily Ma
Staff Writers

Anyone wandering around Commons II after school may hear Georges Enesco's Legend wafting in from the band room, where Alexander Tung, a senior in the Lexington High School Wind Ensemble, is already practicing for the spring pops concert.

Tung has played the trumpet for nine years. Although he started his musical career on the piano, the trumpet has become his favorite instrument.

"I find the trumpet has a naturally broader dynamic and tonal range. It is much easier and feels more natural, at least for myself, to convey an artistic idea through the trumpet than other instruments," Tung said.

Tung has deeply involved himself in various ensembles both affiliated and unaffiliated with LHS. In addition to the LHS Wind Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble and Jazz Combo, he has participated in youth orchestras since the seventh grade, including the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras and New England Conservatory Preparatory School's Youth Philharmonic Orchestra.

"Out-of-school orchestras are special because they require a level of discipline and care about making music to even receive acceptance," Tung said.

Tung also appreciates the role of the Lexington music program in his musical evolution.

"The undeniable talent found in [the] instrumental programs provided me with ample opportunity to explore various styles of music and push myself with other passionate musicians. I attribute .... a significant part of my growth as a passionate musician [to the LHS music program]," Tung said.

His musical talent and hard work are evidence in his accolades: He won first place in the senior division of the 2018 International Trumpet Guild Youth Competition, and was named "Outstanding Soloist" at both the Lincoln Center's 2017 Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival and the 2017 Charles Mingus High School Competition.

Despite the numerous awards he has earned over the years, Tung remains humble and draws inspiration from other great trumpet players.

"I have always been inspired by Alison Balsom... She combines the variety of ideas I reach for in my playing—a beautiful, rich, soloistic tone and technical ability so great she has transcended her instrument. She, however, does not take part in jazz or in improvisation—I look to Clifford Brown for inspiration in this genre," Tung said.

When he is not practicing the trumpet, Tung can be found composing or playing with his dog.

Staff photos by Shweta Kondapi
Senior trumpeter Alexander Tung poses for a photo before his concert.

Breaking Boundaries: Women in jazz work to overcome bias

Elizabeth Zhang
Columnist

Lexington High School has beginning jazz classes, jazz seminars, Jazz Ensemble, Jazz Combo and Septet, which performs jazz.

In other words, at LHS, jazz is big.

"All the people in the jazz community that I've met are really quirky and nerdily into it but in a really cool way. It's just really cool to see people unashamed about how into it they are," Mira Ward, a junior jazz drummer, said.

The LHS jazz community is also a tight-knit group.

"I think the best part about this community is that people are always there to support one another. They always come to see you at events, partly because people like listening to jazz and they really appreciate the music, but also to support their friends," Yoojee Kim, a senior jazz vocalist, said. "I think when you are in an ensemble like that, there's a deeper connection in the work you're doing, deeper than the music you're making, that definitely carries over into friendships."

Although the community is inclusive and supportive, women still experience prejudice.

"Sometimes, I feel condescended in certain ways. In situations with other drummers, I'm often less experienced [than] them, which makes sense that they would be like, 'Let me teach you.' But I definitely get that vibe from people like, 'Let me help you,'" Ward said.

Some individuals might oversimplify guiding actions and not respect fellow musicians' experience in the field.

"I'm learning on my own. I don't need you to clap out the beat for me with the metronome... I can listen to the metronome on my own," Ward said.

Prejudice against women may also manifest as blatant disregard.

"I remember one time, a judge just didn't look at me for an entire workshop. He was asking questions to the other guy that was the drummer in the band but not me, and I was like, 'I'm right here, I can help,'" Ward said.

Sometimes, attempts to seem progressive can backfire, and make girls uncomfortable, Kim noted.

"One of the adjudicators made these weird comments...and was like 'Oh wow, a girl on the saxophone' and I remember thinking it was so weird because I would not want to be targeted or called out like that just because I'm a girl," Kim said.

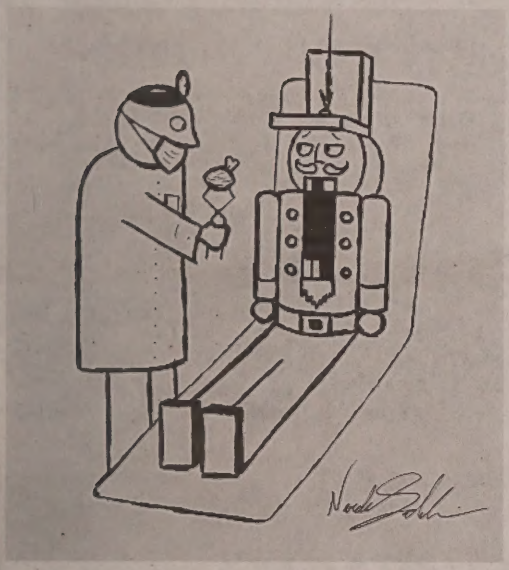
LHS has taken steps to make jazz more inclusive, such as adding women to the curriculum.

"Last year we had a focus on female composers in Jazz Ensemble, so that was really cool because in a lot of ways, people are appreciating the work that we do rather than knocking us down," Kim said.

As Ward says, "We're all just here to play music."

Show tunes our editors love!

1. I'm Here - The Color Purple
2. The Song of Purple Summer - Spring Awakening
3. Ring of Keys - Fun Home
4. What You Own - Rent
5. Me And The Sky - Come from Away
6. The World Will Know - Newsies
7. The Room Where It Happens - Hamilton
8. Crazier than You - The Addams Family
9. Broadway, Here I Come! - Smash
10. Omar Sharif - The Band's Visit
11. Forever Yours - Once on this Island
12. She Used to be Mine - Waitress
13. Too Darn Hot - Kiss Me Kate
14. The Ballad of Sara Berry - 35MM: A Musical Exhibition
15. As Long As You're Mine - Wicked
16. When Your Mind's Made Up - Once
17. I Can Do Better Than That - The Last Five Years
18. Seventeen - Heathers the Musical
19. Breathe - In the Heights
20. Opening: I Hope I Get It - A Chorus Line



Cartoon by Narek Sahakian

Top Ten Comedy Specials on Netflix

Note: These specials reflect the preferences of individual editorial board members, not the official position of the newspaper. The ranking should not be taken too seriously.

1. John Mulaney: Kid Gorgeous at Radio City
2. Ali Wong: Hard Knock Wife
3. Bo Burnham: what.
4. Trevor Noah: Son of Patricia
5. Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King
6. Hannah Gadsby: Nanette
7. Aparna Nancherla: The Standups
8. Tig Notaro: Happy to Be Here
9. Fred Armisen: Stand For Drummers
10. Dave Chappelle: The Bird Revelation

Saturday Night Live remains relatively relevant

■ Ria Bhandarkar
Opinion Editor

Lorne Michaels' variety sketch comedy series, Saturday Night Live, first premiered in 1975. Over the years, cast members have included Gilda Radner, Robert Downey Jr., Bill Murray, Dana Carvey, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Seth Meyers and Lexington's own Rachel Dratch.

Though the show has faced writers' strikes, tumultuous ratings and even terrorist attacks, it is still airing. Now in its 44th season, Saturday Night Live continues to produce comedic hot takes on various news stories and cultural phenomena. However, as the show continues its fifth decade on air, is it really as relevant as it was in the 20th century?

The answer is complicated. Although the show is still witty and often makes unique observations about politics and social norms, it suffers from too many filler sketches, awkward punchlines and drawn out jokes.

Alec Baldwin's portrayal of Donald Trump as a posturing, self-infatuated blowhard blew up the internet—and for good reason. The cold open sketches featuring Baldwin weren't just funny; they were informative and insightful. A recent sketch parodying President Trump's meeting with rapper and icon Kanye West was a playful and nuanced satire of racism and classism.

However, these political sketches have gone downhill since Trump's election. Most cold opens have become more about showing off SNL's celebrity ties than clever political satire, featuring popular actors like Ben Stiller and Robert de Niro as uninspired versions of Michael Cohen and Robert Mueller. Despite Kate McKinnon's excellent skewering of Fox News host Laura Ingraham, placeholders during Alec Baldwin's arrest simply fell flat.

SNL's non political sketches are also hit or miss. While some, such as Tom Hanks' David S. Pumpkins character and John Mulaney's "Lobster Diner" sketch have been wonderfully eccentric, others have left audiences scratching their heads.

Sometimes when SNL sprints towards ridiculousness, it pays off. In a recent sketch series, a scruffy McKinnon is so funny detailing her strange interactions with paranormal creatures that even her castmates have a hard time keeping straight faces.

However, for every witty sketch, there's a tone deaf one. A scene featuring two cops harassing Seth Meyers at a road stop seemed to frame abuse of police power as comedic. It was an uncomfortable miss in an era of police brutality.

SNL isn't good or bad; it's frustratingly inconsistent. But while it doesn't always reach its full potential, SNL provides a much needed laugh.

Athlete of the Issue: Maxwell Seidel is doing swimmingly

Maia Hahn-Du Pont
Jake Fernandes
Staff Writers

Max Seidel, a senior at Lexington High School, is swimming in Wheaties. He qualified for the USA Swimming Scholastic All-American Team and the New England Swimming Top Ten List in 2017-2018, is ranked fifth in Massachusetts and placed third in 2017 in the New England Swimming Senior Championships for the 400 yard individual medley. That's when he's in the United States - he's also a member of the Swiss National Team.

"As a kid I always loved swimming," Seidel said. "Being in the water always made me feel free and allowed me to get away from all the worries in my life."

When he turned 12, Seidel joined a highly competitive team, the Gators Swim Club, which he is still a part of today.

"What drives me, I would say, are the people around me," Seidel said. "Everyday you have the opportunity to be better and being able to push your teammates to be the best they can be is a huge reward."

For Seidel, the benefits of sports go beyond the pool.

"Being able to balance a swim program of 20+ hours a week and [being] able to perform well in school has taught me many life skills and lessons that I will carry with me well after my days of swimming are over," Seidel said.

Some of these skills include productivity, prioritization and organization.

"I have learned through swimming that there is never anything you can't accomplish if you put your mind to it," Seidel said.

He's grateful for the doors swimming has opened for him.

"I think that my favorite thing about being on the team would be the experiences that I have gained through the sport. It has allowed me to travel places that I may not have gone otherwise and has opened up a lot of opportunities for me after high school," Seidel said.

Staff photos by Megha Prasad
Senior Maxwell Siedel is a member of the Swiss National Team

Lexington girls soccer makes a historic appearance in finals

Anelga Hajjar
Manon LeDonne
Staff Writers

On Nov. 10, the Lexington girls soccer team lost 2-0 against Brookline High School in the final round of the the Northern division tournament. The Lexington girls soccer team has not made it this far in the tournament since 2000.

"Making [it to] the tournament is always a goal that we write down at the beginning of the season, but getting to even the second round of the tournament is another hurdle entirely," Elizabeth Stump, a junior on the varsity team, said.

Even as the season wound down, the team was revving up, increasing the intensity of practices to prepare for the Northern division tournament.

"We had amazing teammates that we could rely on and that would push us every day," Stump said.

With a higher number of underclassmen, the team faced an experience gap amid the intense competition of the Middlesex community. Typically, older team members have accumulated more teamwork, tactics and communication skills, but the younger teammates held their own.

"We knew we were a special team," Jenny Fiore, a junior on the team, said.

Team members are happy in spite of the finals loss.

"We were making history," Stump said.

The graduating seniors are Reina Ades, Ava Buchanan, Abigail Donaghy, Sheyda Hershberger, Avani Kabra and Claire Shiple.

Staff photos by Linda Kong
Jenny Fiore and Elizabeth Stump are juniors on the girls varsity soccer team.

The swim team's future is in danger: Please build a pool

Alex Tang
Columnist

Athletics are the backbone of any school's culture. Sports can provide opportunities for students to make friends, exercise and learn invaluable skills such as teamwork and perseverance. With Minuteman Career and Technical High School losing its swimming pool, Lexington High School's boys and girls swimming teams are in jeopardy. The only solution is to build a new pool in Lexington.

With more than 25 Middlesex League Championships, the boys swimming team has captured more titles than any other sports team at LHS. The boys and girls teams collectively have 30 members, but this number could be much higher with a bigger facility. In addition to housing the two LHS swim teams, Minuteman Tech also allows two competitive USA Swimming teams to utilize the facility on a regular basis. This hectic scheduling makes it difficult for LHS teams to create regular, heavy practice schedules. With a new pool, Lexington could generate revenue from renting it to the two USA Swimming teams while also enabling LHS swimmers to practice more effectively. In addition, LHS would save the $23,000 it currently pays Minuteman Tech to use its pool. Furthermore, the swim teams could expand to include both varsity and junior varsity divisions, which would provide opportunities for students with a range of experience levels.

A swimmer myself, I know that the early Saturday morning practices and four-hour-long meet sessions instill discipline and perseverance. Swimming has enabled me to grow as both an athlete and a person. But when I talk to my friends about the grim future of the team, they just shrug it off and say "Lexington has other sports that are more important than swimming."

Boys and girls swimming have 0.22 and 0.32 injuries per 1000 players respectively, while football and other sports have two or more per 1000 players. Swimming is safer and swimmers reap the same, if not greater benefits, as other athletes. But while our town cheers for soccer, basketball and football, swimming is underfunded and unpopular.

The LexSwim organization is proposing a new pool on the grounds next to the Community Center. Although this is a viable option, the town has not included the construction of a new pool in its budget for the 2019 fiscal year.

The bottom line: no pool could mean no team, and we could really use the team.